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ABSTRACT

A course using computer-assisted instruction for the development of second language reading skills is described. The course was developed in the Soviet Union for incorporation into the curriculum of a polytechnic institute. Nine computer programs consisting of learning modules were developed to address specific reading skills not likely to have been attained by students at that level of second language literacy. The modules provide practice in: (1) word recognition and word comprehension; (2) recognition of word boundaries and sentence structures; (3) recognition of the devices used to create textual cohesion, especially referents; (4) sentence completion; (5) vocabulary development, especially inference through conversion and derivation; (6) skimming skills; (7) scanning; (8) reading for global understanding; and (9) reading for total comprehension. (MSE)

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Computers and reading skills development

Introduction

Although still in its infancy, CALL in the USSR is expanding very rapidly. Confined largely to universities, teacher training and technical colleges it has changed markedly over the past few years. Traditionally CALL in this country has been associated with test-oriented packages. Recent years witnessed a move away from the traditional approach to CALL. The computer-assisted course for the teaching of reading developed at the Yaroslavl Polytechnic represents one of the current trends in CALL in the USSR.

There were many reasons for us to undertake a project aimed at creating such a course. First, reading is the most important practical aim of teaching foreign languages at colleges in this country. The curriculum for foreign languages allocates from 50% to 70% of the course time for the teaching of reading. Second, one of the objectives of PERESTROIKA of higher education in the USSR is associated with significant improvement of organization of students' self-access work. We strongly believe that the use of computers can help us achieve this goal. Third, we have carefully analysed the activities of our students as learners of foreign languages and came to a conclusion that they had little systematic training in reading. These and other reasons made us undertake the project which is to be realised in two stages:

1. The objective of the first stage is the development of a computer-assisted course for teaching reading. This stage has in general been completed and some results of the work will be discussed in my paper.
2. The second stage aims at incorporating the course into the current curriculum and assessing its efficiency through prac-

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tice.

In this paper I'M going to describe the course and discuss the objectives and principles underlying each program.

Description of the computer-assisted course for reading skills development

In the present paper reading will be regarded as a process whereby one looks at and understands what has been written /1.p.2/. Reading involves a variety of skills the main of which are as follows /2,p.4-5/ :

-Recognizing the script of a language
-Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
-Understanding explicitly stated information
-Understanding information when not explicitly stated
-Understanding conceptual meaning
-Understanding the communicative value(function) of sentences and utterancies
-Understanding relations within the sentence
-Understanding relations between the parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices
-Understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
-Interpreting text by going outside it
-Recognizing indicators in discourse
-Identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse
-Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
-Extracting salient points to summarize(the text, an idea etc.)
-Selective extraction of relevant points from a text
-Basic reference skills
-Skimming
-Scanning to locate specifically required information
-Transcording information to diagrammatic display

In order to acquire these skills, a series of programs has developed. Each of the programs focuses on a particular reading skill and provides practice for students at beginners level and above. We must admit,however, that not all of the skills cited in the list above have been covered by the corresponding prog-

rams. For example, letter recognition pragrams have not been included in the course since the students who come to the Polytechnic have already passed that stage of initial literacy in English.

Package 1 of our course provides practice in word recognition and word comprehension. It contains two programs which work at the word and sentence level of language. Problems associated with word recognition have been investigated by Paul Meara who has come to a conclusion that "... learners have considerable difficulty with words in their second language, even when they are dealing with words that they know quite well" /3,p.101/. Learners may confuse words that look similar, such as "quite" and "quiet" and this kind of mistakes is particularly common among Russian students as our language does not use an alphabet like that of English. In view of this we have developed two programs which can be used to help develop word recognition and word comprehension skills. These skills are very important, for when the student misreads words, he looses sense of what he is reading and has to go back over the material again.

Program 1 gives the students practice in responding rapidly but accurately to the appearance of English words. It asks them to read as quickly as possible and mark with the cursor the word that is the same as the first one given:

sing sink-sang-sins-sing-sink

This is a "flash" type of program. The computer prints a line and the student's task is to mark the right word by moving the cursor and pressing the "RETURN" key before the line disappears. The computer choses lines at random from a list of, say, 50 lines. This program keeps a score, and there is a choice of speeds, ranging from 5 to 2 seconds. Thus, the students can increase the speed as they progress in the recognition skill.

The same program can be used to help develop word comprehension skill. This time the student is asked to read as quickly as possible and mark with the cursor the word that means the same as the first one given:

folks methods-people-habits-songs

The use of this program should be limited to the early stages, because it focuses attention at single word level, whereas research shows that effective rapid readers read in groups of words. A variation on the above program may be a technique of "flashing" a word-pair or even a sentence for recognition and comprehension.

Program 2 asks the students to identify if pairs of words that appear on the computer screen are different or the same:

make up - muke up
walk out - watch out
fine loss- fire loss

The student has to press the "Y" key for "YES" or "N" key for "NO".

The other specific features of the program are similar to those of Program 1. Use of program 2 can be turned into a more purposeful activity for the students if a situation is built around it. For example, the student could be told: "Suppose, you are interested in environmental protection. Look at the following headlines and show by pressing the "Y" or "N" key which newspaper articles you might read".

USSR and USA against smog

Interest rate cut
Night of murder
Air pollution-strong measures should be taken

Again the program keeps a score, and a choice of speeds is available. An authoring program is included to enable the teacher to tailor lists of items to the needs of particular learners.

If Package 1 contains pragrams which assist in developing word recognition and word.comprehension skills, programs of Package 2 are designed to teach the students to recognise sentence structures.

Program 1 of Package 2 helps with recognition of word boundaries. The students are offered to put spaces into a sentence written as a single word. For example:

Weareallwaitingforyou.
Idonot usuallyworkveryhard.
Hehasreadthisbook.

Sentences appear on the computer screen one after another and the student puts spaces by moving the cursor and pressing the appropriate key. The Program keeps a score and shows how many attempts were used to put a definite number of spaces. The sentences are chosen at random by the computer from a list of, say, 50, and the student can repeat the exercise several times in an attempt to attain the best result.

Most of the reading techniques trained while working with the programs included in Package 2 are already familiar to our students in their native language. But it is necessary to retrain them, as some students have difficulty in applying them to English. Practice shows that it is important to train the students, as early as possible, to look first for the "core" of the sentence(subject + verb). In order to do that, the student can be asked to "locate" the subject and the head of the main verb, divide sentences into sense groups or recognize sentence boundaries.

Program 2 asks the students to "locate" the subject and the head of the main verb in the main clause. The student is presented with a sentence consisting of one or more clauses. He moves the cursor to the place where he thinks the subject is and presses the appropriate key. If his choice is correct the marked word will begin flashing, thus confirming the correctness of the decision taken. The student then goes on looking for the head of the main verb. The program can be used in different ways. Some of the students would like to make use of the "help page" facility and read information about the grammar signals which help identify the subject and the main verb and only then go on to a practice stage. The other students, on the other hand, might wish to discover the grammatical rules by trial and error method. The program keeps a record of the number of attempts, thus, allowing the learners and the teacher to assess the progress made.

Program 3 asks the students to divide sentences into sense groups. The presentation begins with an explanation in Russian of how it should be done. Then a sentence appears on the computer screen and the student moves the cursor to the boundary of the first sense group. The cursor is stopped in the space dividing the two adjacent groups and the appropriate key is pressed.

If the decision is correct, the space between the sense groups increases and division of the sentence into the sense groups becomes visible. If a wrong decision is taken, then no transformation occurs. A score that the program keeps about the number of attempts per the number of correct answers can help the teacher assess the stage of development of the corresponding skill of the learner.

Program 4 takes a sentence from a continuous text and breaks it into chunks, which are then scrambled. The student is presented with the randomly ordered chunks, which have to be restored to their original order. For example:

on dry land
existed
than we thought
animal life
34-million years earlier

At any time the student can ask to see his sentence as a continuous piece of text.

Program 5 works at the text level and asks the student to put punctuation and capital letters into a text. Presented with a text printed only in lower case letters the student is to recognize the sentence boundary, put the full stop at the end of the sentence and begin the next sentence with the capital letter. Only the students who understand relations within the sentence can cope with the task.

Another area in which it is essential to prepare the students is in recognizing the various devices used to create textual cohesion and more particularly the use of reference and link-words. It is important for the students to realize that a text is not made up of independent sentences or clauses, but that it is a web of related ideas that are announced, introduced and taken up again later throughout the passage with the help of references. Programs included in Package 3 can help the students recognize this use of reference more quickly. Program 1 asks the students to fill in the gaps with suitable linking words. For example:

Jane sleeps for ten hours every night,___?___ she is always tired in the classroom.

1.although 2.while 3.because 4.until 5.lest 6.when

Sentences appear in the centre and a list of numbered link-words is presented at the bottom of the computer screen. The student gives an answer by pressing an appropriate key. If the answer is correct, the question mark disappears and the link-word appears in its place. After a wrong try nothing happens. The program allows a number of different link-words for each gap when it is possible, and after a successful attempt displays the other acceptable link-words as well. It also keeps a score and the teacher can easily find out how well the learner understands the meaning of the link-words.

The same program can be used to deal with the articles which give a lot of trouble to Russian learners of English. There are no articles in Russian and our students tend to ignore "these tiny words", considering them unimportant. Yet, the articles play a prominent role in linking sentences and ideas together. For example, in a sentence "I put the money back in my pocket" the article "the"(in the money) shows that the money has been mentioned before. On the other hand, an indefinite article can act as a signal indicating the introduction of a new term(or word) which can be the antecedant of a reference to be mentioned below. That is why we consider it important to train students in using the articles to produce a coherent progression in the text.

Working with Pregram 1 the student is asked to fill in the gaps in a text with appropriate articles. For example:

> Recently people living in__?__ small village north of London were alarmed by claims that_____ leopard had been seen in_____ area._____ farmer's wife saw____ leopard, while she was feeding her chickens. etc.

If the student has found the correct solution, the article replaces the question mark which jumps over to the next gap. Inserting the articles the student restores the original text.

Program 2 asks the student to mark with the cursor the antecedent of the emphasised (or underlined) word. For example:

> The spaceship was about two metres high. It was round at the bottom and pointed at the top.

The student is to move the cursor to the word which he thinks is the antecedent of the emphasised reference word and press the "Return key". Flashing of the marked word will confirm that a correct solution has been made.

While working with Program 3 the student is presented with sentences, or groups of sentences in a jumbles order, and his task is to re-arrange them into a coherent order. For example:

1. When it was time to leave, my own clothes were dry.
2. While I was running to the nearest bus-stop, a large car splashed me from head to foot.
3. Lest I should catch a cold, my friend lent me some dry clothes.
4. Although it was raining, I had to go out.
5. I couldn't change my clothes, until I reached my friend'd house.

Having decided which of the sentences must be the first in the paragraph, the student is to press the key with the sentence number. The sentence will jump to its new location at the beginning of the paragraph, provided the choice has been correctly. A wrong choice brings about no change in the sequence of the sentences. Having got the order right, the student can exit from the program or do a similar exercise.

The above programs are absolutely necessary for achieving proficiency in reading. If the student does not understand intra-sentential connectors, he may also fail to recognize the communicative value of the passage since those words act as signals indicating the function of what follows(e.g. announcing a conclusion, an example, a supposition). From the very beginning students should therefore be taught not only to understand them when they come across them, but also to look out for such markers. This will be useful to them when skimming, since the simple recognition of those link-words will help them to understand the development of the argument in the passage.

Reading is an active skill. It constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. When we read, our eyes do not follow each letter of the word or each word of

the text one after the other. On the contrary, many letters, words and even expressions are simply skipped. This is possible due to the skill of predicting. An effective reader is capable of predicting how a word, sentence or even a paragraph will develop using morphological, structural, logical and cultural clues as a background for his predictions. He makes hypotheses and goes forward to confirm them. If there is no confirmation in the text the reader has to go back and put forward new hypotheses. This skill is basic to all the reading techniques and should be practiced on a systematic ground. It is worthwhile to give the students unfinished words, and sentences to complete. Package 4 deals with this sort of exercises.

Program 1 asks the student to reconstruct a word by guessing the letters which the computer has replaced with dashes. For example:

teach__ ; writ___

Wrong guesses are rejected by the program, but when the student prints in the right answer, it appears on screen. Words are chosen at random by the computer from a list stored in its memory. There is a "cheat" key which will display the right answer.

Program 2 is a computerized cloze test in which the teacher specifies in advance the words to be deleted and provides a number of alternative acceptable answers for each gap (if more than one is appropriate). It is possible to limit the gaps to specific types of words such as prepositions, conjunctions and articles, or parts of words such as prefixes, suffixes and verb endings. For example:

> Samanta was born __1__ 1966 __2__ London. When she was 13, she looked almost like an adult. __3__ 1982 her mother sent Samantha's photo __4__ the Sun newspaper. It was then that her career as a fashion model started.

The program puts the preposition in place when the right answer is found. The gaps are numbered but do not reveal the lengths of the missing answers. When a "help" key is pressed, the program shows the first letter of the word and its length by displaying the corresponding number of dashes. By hitting the "help" key for the second time the student makes the second letter ap-

pear in the gap. Thus, the text is reconstructed, gap by gap.

Program 3 teaches the students to predict the development of sentences. Sentences are divided into two halves which are displayed in column A and column B. The sentence-halves in column B have been scrambles randomly by the computer, and the student's task is to join up the matching first and second halves to make acceptable sentences. For example:

Education is ...	... everyone will see that it tilts.
It is an edifice ...	... no one will notice.
An educator once said...	... the carpentry of the mind.
If the first few stories are out of line...	... of information and logic.
But when the building is 18 or 20 stories high...	... "Raising a child is very much like building a sky-scraper".

Using the arrow keys the students move items in column A and B up and down until two matching items are in the centre of the computer screen. The students confirm their choice by pressing the "Return" key. If they are right, the two items disappear from the screen. If they are stuck, they can "cheat" up an answer. The program keeps a score and the students try to achieve the best results. If they opt to repeat the exercise, the items will appear in a different order due to the computer's ability to randomize.

When used systematically, the programs described above can help learners develop various reading skills. But totally skills-oriented approach is inappropriate in a short course aimed at teaching reading. The teacher will need to focus sometimes on reading skills, and sometimes on language. Now we shall be looking for a few minutes at some ways in which the computer can be useful both to the teacher and to the students in dealing with vocabulary, e.g. in selecting what M. West called "the reading vocabulary", in mastering this vocabulary and in acquiring the technique necessary for comprehension of unfamiliar words.

Teaching and learning vocabulary is often a rather neglected area. The problem with us is that time is short. In these circumstances the teacher reasons that vocabulary can be learnt quite well at home. But the teaching and learning of vocabulary is very difficult, and the first problem to solve is what words and idioms the student should retain. In accordance with the data used in lexico-statistics, some 2300-2500 carefully selected words allow the learner to comprehend approximately 85% of a text. The above mentioned word-layer contains about 500 most frequent words including prepositions, conjunctions and structural words which are usually acquired when doing grammar exercises. The knowledge of these words is indispensable for all those who wish to become effective readers regardless of their special interests. The selection of the rest of the "reading vocabulary", on the other hand, should be tailored to the needs and interests of particular learners. This aspects of teacher's job is especially important at colleges where, like at the Yaroslavl Polytechnic, various ESP courses are taught. In view of the above, our course contains a program which helps the teacher select the "reading vocabulary" for different ESP courses. Using the Program we can obtain very valuable information about the vocabulary of a collection of ESP texts. The computer can produce a word list of every word that occurs at least once in the collection and give information on the word frequency. Besides, the context in which a particular word occurs can be presented in the form of a concordance of the word.

The availability of this information makes it possible to use the words from the "reading vocabulary" in the above mentioned programs working at the word level, while the computer-readable collection of the ESP texts can be used for teaching intensive reading. The proposed approach to the selection and use of the "reading vocabulary" can, in our opinion, help facilitate its acquisition by the student. Any "mechanical" extension of the "reading vocabulary" is not feasible in a short course, since a knowledge of, say, 4000 words by the student allows him to comprehend only about 91% of a text. The solution of the problem of increasing the "reading vocabulary" of the student should be sought along different lines. Developing the skill of inference

is ,probably, one of the best solutions.

By infering we understand making use of morphological, syntactic, logical and cultural clues to discover the meaning of unknown elements. If these are words, then reference through the conversion and derivation are of special interest to us. When dealing with a new text, it is better not to explain the difficult words to the learner beforehand. The learners should be encouraged to infer the meaning of the words they do not know rather than look them up in a dictionary. If they need to look at the dictionary to get a precise meaning, they should only do so after having tried to work out a solution on their own. That is why, from the very beginning, it is vital to develop the skill of inference. Programs of Package 5 are designed to develop inference through the conversion and derivation.

Program 1 aims at developing the ability to deduce the meaning of unknown words through conversion. Prerequisite for this is the ability to decide what part of speech the word is. The computer displays a sentence in which a word is highlighted. The student is to select the part of speech from a list of choices. For example:

- The bridge crosses the river at its narrowest point.
- The old lady was really cross with the boy who broke her window.
- The drink tasted like a cross between coffee and hot chocolate.

1. noun 2. verb 3. adjective 4. adverb

The same program can then ask for the meaning of a word. For example:

- He gave me a black look.

1. черный 2. сердитый 3. сажа

A knowledge of the principles of word-building, especially prefixes and suffixes, is useful for any student, and in particular to the one who learns to read. Using the skill of inference through derivation the student can deduce the meanings of unknown words and, thus, enlarge his "reading vocabulary". The "help page" facility containing information about derivational

formations is designed to facilitate the acquisition of the inference skill. The program just described can also work at the word level and ask the student to state the part of speech of a derived form or the meaning of the form. For example:

renew-?

1. adjective 2. verb 3. noun 4. adverb

or

1. возобновлять 2. новый 3. обновление

It should be clear that the above program aims at helping the student to work out the technique of dealing with unfamiliar words rather than teaching vocabulary.

Another important point to keep in mind when devising reading skills programs is that there is not one type of reading but several according to one's reasons for reading. The students will never become effective readers unless they can adapt their reading speed and technique to their aim when reading. The main ways of reading are as follows: /2,p.4/:

- Skimming: quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it.
- Scanning: quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.
- Extensive reading: reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure. This is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding.
- Intensive reading: reading shorter texts, to extract specific information. This is more an accuracy activity involving reading for detail.

These different ways of reading depend on our reading purposes, which, in their turn, constantly vary in real life. When developing programs we should, therefore, vary the questions and the activities according to the type of the text studied and the purpose in reading it. We should try to put the students in an authentic situation.

Package 6 deals with developing the skimming skills. The purpose of skimming is simply to see what a text is about or how it is organized. The reader skims in order to satisfy a ve-

ry general curiosity about the text, and not to find the answer to particular questions. Hence, it is natural to give the students a text and ask them to select the appropriate title from a group of titles. Short newspaper articles are very convenient for this: The US National Security Council, the Pentagon and the Department of State gave the go ahead to a plan for an exchange of cadets from the US. West Point military academy and Soviet military academies. For a start, 10-12 Soviet and US military cadets will spend several weeks visiting each other and attending classes with their counterparts. All participants in the exchange must know the language of the "enemy". (Moscow News weekly, No 7, 1989).

1. CHRISTMAS SHOPPING 2. CHILDREN MEET FRIDAY
3. WELCOME, CADETS 4. ROAD DELAYS

There shouldn't be too great a similarity between the "correct version" and the others, otherwise the students will be forced into intensive reading. Skimming can be practiced from the intermediate stages onwards.

Package 7 gives practice in scanning. When scanning, we only try to locate specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to do so. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it be a name, a date, or a less specific piece of information. There is a great range of texts suitable for scanning-indexes, dictionaries, advertisements, reference material etc. Often, however, it may be necessary to scan continuous prose. Here is an example of a text and a task illustrating how scanning can be appropriately practiced. Instruction to the students may offer, first, to read the questions and then start scanning the text that follows. On finding the required information, the student is to press the key which has the same number as the sentence containing the information. For example:

Text 1 : The Discovery of Australia

1. When did Europeans settle in Australia?

1. Australia was unknown to Europeans 362 years ago and no Europeans settled there until 1788. 2. Though, long before

the seventeenth century, people thought there was land in southern oceans, nobody had seen it. 3. So it was called Terra Australia Incognita- Unknown South Land.

A good feature of both skimming and scanning programs is the option of TIMED READING. Computers are ideal for teaching speed reading, as they are capable of displaying text for a limited period of time, fixed either in advance by the programmer or at the keyboard by the student. For the nervous learner, there is the choice of speed zero- which converts the program to a conventional, untimed reading comprehension test. The "cheat" feature will give the student the correct answer should he fail to find it himself.

Reading for the central idea, i.e. for global understanding, is more complicated than scanning. Now the reader is concerned with general meaning of the text which is sometimes difficult to grasp. Writers do not always express things directly- sometimes they imply them. One should remember that it is difficult to understand implications in a foreign language. Working with Package 8 the student gets training in reading for general understanding. Below is the instruction he gets before being presented with a text.

1. Concentrate on finding and following the writer's central idea. Do not attempt to remember details such as exact dates, lists of names, large numbers and the like.
2. If you find an occasional word which you do not understand or lose the sense of a phrase here and there, do not stop to re-read the material, continue reading.
3. The text is followed by comprehension items. First read the text, then choose the right answer.

The computer displays the text, which, after the student has read it, disappears from screen. The student is then presented with multiple-choice questions. The program will tell the student which questions have been answered correctly and where mistakes have been made. The student may then opt between re-reading the text or making use of the "cheat" feature.

When practicing intensive reading (Package 9) the student has to read for total comprehension- that is, for an understanding both of the central idea and of the supporting details. Before starting the work he may be asked to read the following instruction:

1. Force yourself to read a bit faster than seems comfortable. Rapid reading will actually help you to concentrate better on ideas, for you will not have time to concern yourself with individual words.
2. As you read, try to get a sense of the writer's organization. Look for the central ideas, but do not neglect the supporting details which the writer uses to reach his conclusions or support his argument.
3. Do not stop if you come across an unfamiliar word, continue reading, and quite likely the general meaning of the sentence will become clear to you or the rest of the sentence may make the meaning of the new word clear to you. If you doesn't, look up the unfamiliar word using the automatic dictionary facility.
4. Try to avoid going back and re-reading words and phrases. Readers who develop a habit of re-reading parts of sentences generally harm rather than help their comprehension. Start with the idea that you will comprehend everything the first time.

The procedure that follows is similar to the one discussed above. Only this time comprehension questions may touch upon the supporting details as well. While reading for total comprehension the student can make use of the automatic dictionary facility. All he has to do is to move the cursor to the word he needs to know and press an appropriate key. The meaning of the unknown word will then appear in a special "window" on the computer screen, thus allowing the student to concentrate his attention on extracting meaning rather than wasting his time turning over the leaves of a conventional dictionary.

Conclusions

This paper was not intended as a comprehensive account of

the potential of the computer for developing reading skills. It was hoped that the above information would give you some idea of the useful role the computer can play in teaching and learning to read. Thus, our computer-assisted course can help students to develop the following basic reading skills:

-recognising and understanding words (Package 1)
-understanding relations within the sentence (Package 2)
-understanding relations between the parts of a text through lexical and grammatical cohesion devices (Package 3)
-predicting skills (Package 4)
-skills of inference through conversion and derivation (Package 5)
-skills of skimming (Package 6)
-skills of scanning (Package 7)
-skills of extensive reading (Package 8)
-skills of intensive reading (Package 9)

In order to facilitate acquisition of these skills by the students our course for reading skills development offers:

-Ease of use
-Flexibility
-Authoring programs
-Teaching and Testing modes
-Automatic dictionary facility
-"Help" page" feature

In conclusion, it is important to underline that reading is essentially a private and individual process. Reading skills are achieved by the learner through practice. The more the learner practices, the more chance there is of improvement. We can only hope that our course will be able to provide enough practice to the learners and make their learning easy and enjoyable.

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